

162 DOMESTIC LIFE AND ECONOMY

● 541 Cock-fighting is the favourite pastime of the Bison-horn Marias, well-known venues being the weekly markets at Kuakonda, Paknar, Kukanar, Bastanar Ghat and near Karli, among several others. They tie iron knives to the cocks' legs. If the cocks break away, their owners pick them up and rub their hackles or spit into their beaks to get their blood up. The defeated cock always becomes the property of the victor's owner. On any market morning you can see scores of Bison-horn Marias walking to market with cocks tucked under their arms. Hill Marias do not themselves go in much for this pastime; only a few of them even stay to watch cock-fighting at Dhaurai market. Some of the Kutru Hill Marias attend cock-fighting every week at Oikal in the Ahiri zamindari of Chanda.

231 Goats are seldom kept by the Hill Marias, though at Nugur in the Indrawati valley the Parilo clan, despite the fact that its totem
614 is the goat, kept goats for the Teli tradesmen who owned the village rice bins described on page 102; but they could not eat goat flesh or even take goat milk.

Among the Bison-horn Marias, many, including even those who belong to the goat phratry and goat clans, keep goats and use goat milk; but totemistic rules prohibit members of goat clans and phratry from eating goat flesh.

231 As has been seen, the Hill Marias are not rich in cattle, do not milk them or yoke them to carts or ploughs, and generally keep Rawat herdsmen to tend them. Nearly all eat beef
Cattle and whenever they can afford it. Bullock or cow sacrifice
buffaloes is almost an essential part of funeral ceremonies, and all present eat the meat. Dead cattle are divided up and eaten; at Kutru, Hill Marias ate all that remained of a cow killed by a family of man-eating tigers, though the mangled remains had been gnawed by hyaenas and jackals, and exposed to the sun for four or five days till full of flies and maggots. The headmen of the villages of Padalibhum, Tapalibhum, Behramar, Nurbhum and Sonpur Mar parganas frankly admitted that they liked eating beef when they could get it; at Handawada, on the other side of the hills, the headmen of the Dantewara Mar and Mangnar pargana villages asserted that they never eat dead cattle, and only eat the beef of sacrificed animals. There are practically no buffaloes in the Abujmar hills.

231 The Bison-horn Marias are great stock-raisers, both of cattle
439 and buffaloes, and they export many head of cattle to Chanda and Raipur, as well as over the Madras border; in fact the land revenue is often paid out of the price received for cattle, and one of their favourite grievances is the cattle export duty of a rupee or two
231 imposed by the State. They use cattle for ploughing and are

SUPPLEMENT

391

he would repay with 50 per cent. interest.¹ Although it is clear that these Teli, Kalar and Telugu money-lenders do levy an exorbitant toll on the Maria villagers' produce, it is equally clear that they are fulfilling a necessary function, which has become the more necessary since the stopping of *podu* or *jalapod* cultivation below the hills has restricted the Marias in most villages to permanent rice cultivation on small acreages always dependent on seasonal rainfall evenly distributed in time. If such money-lenders are excluded, then they must be replaced by Government grain depots and village grain banks.

Of Maria funeral rites the *Gazetteer* observes that a stone or a carved post about five feet high is usually put up to mark the spot where a man's body has been cremated, and that 'sometimes one comes across a forest glade strewn with these memorials, the only sign of some deserted village, the very name of which has perished'.² Many rows of carved wooden posts may be seen between Bhamragarh and Lahiri, while at Lahiri itself I saw scores of such posts and of the small cromlechs (*hanal-garya* or 'thrones of the Departed') described on page 273, and mentioned in the *Gazetteer*³ as built on the spot where the body was burned. The top of one of these very substantial funerary posts, or *hanal-gutta*, photographed at Lahiri, is reproduced as one of the illustrations in this Supplement. Noticeable are the carved wooden horns, between which is a carved wooden bird, probably a hornbill. The wooden horns are common, and probably are a modern symbol of the cow formerly sacrificed at the erection of a menhir or wooden *hanal-gutta* by Hill Marias⁴ and Bison-horn Marias⁵ throughout Bastar: the funerary customs of the Chanda Marias seemed, however, to be Hill Maria in type, and this was confirmed by oral enquiries at Lahiri.

The addiction of the Bison-horn Marias and of the Kutru Hill Marias of Bastar to cock-fighting has been described on page 162. I particularly inquired if the weekly cock-fights at Oikal in Ahiri zamindari, there mentioned, and at Lahiri itself still went on. But all cock-fighting among Chanda Marias had for some years been stopped under orders from an inexperienced young European District Superintendent of Police on the theory that it contravened the Gambling Act. But the Marias maintained that, as in Bastar, so here, there had never been cash betting (as, indeed, one might expect in a region where all transactions are still so largely in kind), but the defeated bird had passed to the owner of the winning bird.

¹ For further details, see *The Aboriginal Problem*, pp. 183-4.

² *Chanda District Gazetteer* (Allahabad, 1909), p. 106.

³ *Ibidem*, loc. cit.

⁴ See pp. 278-9.

⁵ See p. 281.

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656 Such iron knives or spurs as were tied on to the cock's legs were very small, and a Lahiri Maria criticized the usual theory that this way of increasing a cock's natural armament is cruel on the ground that if it meant a quicker death for the defeated cock it was merciful. All the headmen promised that if the ban on cock-fights were lifted they would frown on cash or grain betting, and, if we so desired, on the use of iron spurs and knives. Thoughtless officiousness such as that which stopped this favourite tribal pastime is only too typical of the lack of imagination with which officials, great and small, are apt to interfere with all that lends colour to aboriginal life.

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114 Lahiri was one of the chief camps where I questioned the local Marias as to their clan organization, particularly the grouping of clans into phratries according to the number of *Chuddur penk* or Little Gods. I mentioned on pages 194-5 my doubts as to the traditional accounts of this god-grouping among the Chanda Marias. But these accounts go back to Lucie-Smith's 1869 Chanda Settlement Report. A somewhat confusing summary of his account, on page 101 of the *Gazetteer*, seems to imply that there is little difference between the god-grouping of the Raj-Gond, the other Gond tribes of Chanda. Lucie-Smith divided the Raj-Gonds into a four-god group, with the tortoise and crocodile totems, a five-god group with the iguana totem, a six-god group with the tiger totem, and a seven-god group with the porcupine totem: these groups were divided into what the *Gazetteer* calls 'houses or families, distinguished by their family name or *padi*', i.e. into what in this book have been called clans (*pari*), which numbered 28 among the Raj-Gonds, 24 among the Marias and 17 among the Dhurve Gond. Russell and Hiralal (Vol. III, p. 66) say that in Chanda:—

'There are four main groups worshipping seven, six, five and four gods respectively, and each group contains ten to fifteen septs. A man cannot marry a woman of any sept which worships the same number of gods as himself. Each group has a sacred animal which the members revere, that of the seven-god worshippers being a porcupine, of the six-god worshippers, a tiger, of the five-god worshippers, the *saras* crane, and of the four-god worshippers, a tortoise. As a rule the members of the different groups do not know the names of their gods, and in practice it is doubtful whether they restrict themselves to the proper number of gods of their own group. Formerly there were three-, two-, and one-god worshippers, but in each of these classes it is said that there were only one or two septs, and they found that they were much inconvenienced by the paucity of their numbers, perhaps for the purposes of communal worship and feasting, and hence they got themselves enrolled in the larger groups. In reality it would appear that the classification according to the number of gods worshipped is being forgotten and the three lowest groups have disappeared.'

They suggested that this conjecture was supported by the fact that in Chhindwara and other localities only two large six-god and seven-god groups remained.

THE MURIA AND THEIR GHOTUL

Johan Karsana

This game, which is one of the many attractive games played in the big ghotul at Alor, is a saluting game. The motiari form a line, the leader comes forward, bends down with her back to the others and swings to left and right, touching the feet of each in turn. She goes down the line and the next in order follows her.

Song

[539]

Didi boli boli kudum heli lo,

Sister, say, we have stamped our feet,

Utti pao parilo pulti pao parilo.

Saluting the feet this side and that. We saw the old fort, we saw the new fort.

Juna garh dehhilo naua garh dehhilo.

We made friendship with rice. We gave greeting to the Raja.

Sakhi channur badilo.

O the golden cock crowed!

Raja tiha tikilo.

The red cock crowed

Son kukra pasilo!

Kumar kukra basilo

Ki hi ri hir.

Ki hi ri hir.

Kudum represents the sound of stamping feet. After the song has been sung through to the sister, it is done for the mother-in-law, cousin, sister-in-law, anyone you please.

A Guessing Game

The Muria have a guessing game called Mundi Karsana. In Phulpar the girls stood in a circle holding out their hands. One of the boys put a ring into a girl's hand. Then the other boys had to come one by one to guess where it was.

In Metawand, this was played by boys and girls together sitting down, but the principle was the same. Sometimes the guesser puts his hand on each forehead in turn: it is believed that whoever has the ring will have a hot head.

A Game with Myrabolams

In Nayanar, I watched the chelik playing with harra-myrabolams. Two boys sat facing each other, each had a pile of myrabolams. The first boy picked up a handful, threw them into the air, and tried to catch as many as possible on the back of his hand. He failed to catch any, and lost his turn, and the other boy made the attempt. He caught two and put these beside him, the next throw he caught one, then three, but at last, though he had only three stones left, he dropped them all and lost his turn. Then the first boy tried again.¹

X. COCK-FIGHTING

Cock-fighting is a popular sport among the Muria of the central and northern parganas, but it is little followed in the east where it is said to be a pastime worthy only of Ganda.² But in the west and central areas, cocks are specially

¹ A similar game is known as *Dhapa* by the Pauri Bhuiya.—Roy, *The Hill Bhuiyas*, p. 285. I have seen it in Mandla, and it is probably universally distributed.

² For an excellent account of cock-fighting among Kol, Bhumi and Uraon, see *North Indian Notes and Queries*, Vol. II (1892), p. 95. Thurston considered it a 'disgusting spectacle' and agreed with Colonel Newcome that it should be performed in secret. He describes cock-fighting among the Mohammedans of Mysore who do not use steel spurs but

GAMES

reared and trained to fight. It is said that in the good old days, the fights used to be between two men, and the spectators bet on the result. Cock-fighting came in when this exciting custom was forbidden. Large meetings 54 ●
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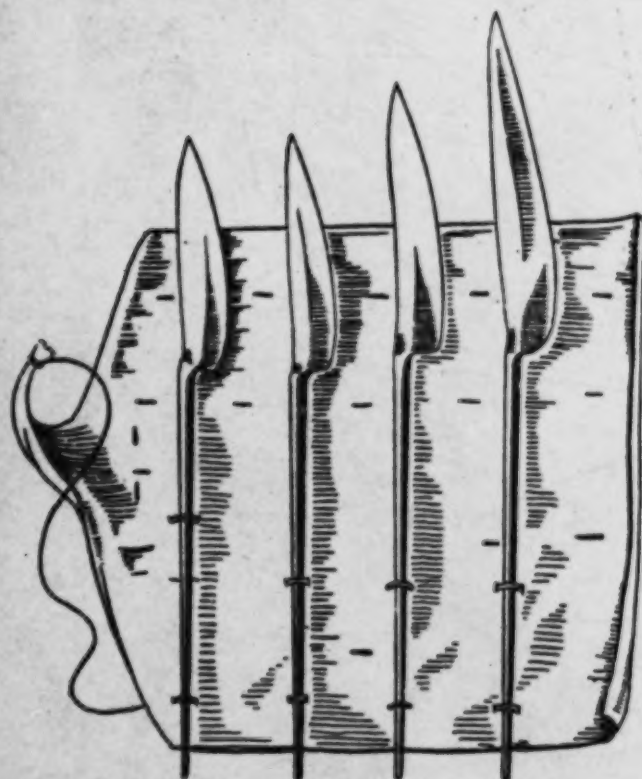


FIG. 146. Set of cock-fighting knives in cloth bag
Length of longest knife 5'

are held at the end of most of the bazaars late in the afternoon. Special meetings are also called in the larger Muria villages, both regularly and on

sharpen the natural spurs with a knife. 'A real good fight' he says 'may last for several hours.' This, and several other details of Thurston's description, seem to me a little doubtful. Thurston adds that the sport was popular in South Canara among the Bant, but since it often led to quarrels was discouraged by the police.—*Ethnographic Notes*, p. 262ff. I have never seen it in the Central Provinces, though I have watched main-fighting in Berar State. Other references to cock-fighting will be found in T. R. Pedmonabhachari, 'Games, Sports and Pastimes in Prehistoric India', *Man in India*, Vol. XXI, p. 144; D. N. Majumdar, 'Games of the Hos of Kolhan', *Man in India*, Vol. V, p. 201; J. Barker, 'Assam and the Ahoms in 1660', *JBORS*, Vol. I, p. 186; and in some of the standard monographs on individual tribes.

THE MURIA AND THEIR GHOTUL

574 special occasions such as a gathering of the pargana panchayat. In this part
525 the Muria are enthusiastic over the sport and not inconsiderable sums of money pass to and fro in the bets which inevitably accompany a fight. To the gentle Muria the attraction of cock-fighting is not (as it is to the more blood-thirsty Bison-horn Muria) the excitement of blood and battle, but the pleasure of betting. The cock that loses also becomes the property of the winner.

When the company has gathered in the shade of a great grove of trees, the cocks—which have been brought to the place carefully covered—are measured against each other so that in no fight will they be too unfairly matched. The spur-men, who are Muria specially trained in the business, go aside to tie the spurs to the cocks' feet. These spurs are sharp knife-blades about 3' long and slightly curved, made by the Muria Lohar of locally smelted iron, and are kept in little bamboo cases or rolled up in a cloth hold-all.

The spur-man attaches the blades to the cock's feet, spits on the string and binds it round and round until the blades are firmly fixed at exactly the right height and angle. He then removes dirt from his ears, mixes some with the dust from his left foot with a little spittle and rubs the mess on the blades saying, 'O Mahapurub, O the Departed of my house, you know my truth and goodness. It is for you to give this cock victory'. He removes a feather from the cock's tail, cuts it in two with the blade attached to its leg, spits on it and throws it away. If the cock is victorious, the spur-man receives a leg of its defeated adversary.

The owners now pick up their birds and stand facing each other in the middle of a clearing surrounded by an excited crowd of spectators. They hold the cocks out, make them peck at each other and when they are aroused put them on the ground. The birds usually go to the attack at once, and the fight only lasts a short time. The blades are very deadly and I have frequently seen both cocks fall dead after thirty seconds' combat. Once a cock turns away from its adversary, it is considered defeated.

After a victory, the owner of the cock should make an offering of liquor to the Departed. At Binjhli he was expected to give a coconut to the Village Mother. At Ulers, the Muria said that when they put the cocks into battle they remembered the Departed.

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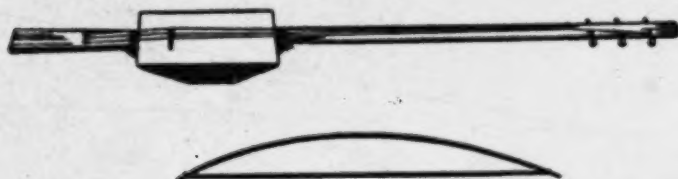
A cock-fight at
Bayanar



Plate CXLI

[p.626(A)]

534 bamboo and the usual flute. They are fond of gongs, but these are not now so common as they were. At the great Pen Karsita at Ghotpal in 1942, the dancers used slabs of



Kikir Fiddle
(Length 2')

coloured wood, bits of old tin and indeed anything that would make a noise instead of the traditional gongs. Like the Muria, at festivals and even for amusement the Maria use a hunting horn, either a real horn or one made of brass.

541 Besides dancing, the chief Maria relaxation is the cock-fight. At the conclusion of all the bigger bazaars, the men retire to a grove of trees and set their cocks against each other. The cocks are armed with sharp and deadly little knives tied to their feet and fights are to the death. The victor has the privilege of taking the defeated bird, but the real excitement comes from the betting.

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844 The ceremonies attending birth and marriage are very simple. The pregnant mother is not hampered by many restrictions on her movements. After the birth of the child the placenta is buried in a pit behind the house. Logs are placed above it and the arrow with which the cord was cut is driven into the ground near by. A small shed is made and the 846 mother lives here for some weeks with her child, taking a daily bath above the placenta-pit. At the end of this period of segregation, the husband gives a feast to the neighbours, [55] the child is named and the mother is permitted to return to her household duties. It was to such a feast that the unhappy victim of the Mardum sacrifice was enticed.¹

881 There are no ceremonies of initiation at puberty, though a

¹ Case No. 31.

114 live side by side with Kolams as well as with non-aboriginal settlers, then climbed to the higher plateau and were fortunate enough to watch a clan-god feast at Pangri. On our way from Pangri to Utnur we passed Marlavai and decided on this village as our future base-camp. Early in February we went to the Kcslapur Jatra, a great Gond feast and fair, held annually fifteen miles north-west of Utnur. From there we turned north and then east into Rajura Taluq, where we visited the famous fort of Manikgarh, now deserted and overgrown by jungle. [124] In various villages of the higher plateau we gathered piecemeal information from both Gonds and Kolams, and by the end of our tour realized that a study of the aboriginals of Adilabad might lead to the very heart of the Gond problem.

123 A slightly embarrassing circumstance during our first tour was the rapidly spreading rumour that I was a recruiting officer and had come to take young Gonds to the war. The general excitement following the Japanese invasion of Malaya, had reached even the Gonds and they interpreted my taking of notes and photographs as a preliminary selection of all the fittest men. And when at the same time the Director-General of Revenue visited Adilabad and Utnur, they took our tours for a concerted movement and thought the lorries with his camp-kit were meant to carry off the recruits. Many hid in the forest and the fields when we passed by and in the villages it was difficult to establish confidence.

But once settled in Marlavai in a house built in Gond style just outside the village, we were soon faced by a difficulty of exactly the opposite nature. For now rumour ran that I was a revenue officer, specially sent to the District to investigate the grievances of Gonds, Kolams and Naikpods, and to give land to all those whom the influx of new settlers had rendered landless. All through the hot weather and the greater part of the rains aboriginals from all parts of the district, some in delegations of thirty and forty, flocked to Marlavai, all wanting their difficulties heard and remedied. Unable to give them any concrete assistance, I had at least to listen to their tales of woe, and many a day passed when the only anthropological information swelling my note-books was the distressingly monotonous account of a culture-contact resulting invariably in the expropriation and economic enslavement of the aboriginal.¹

114 From March to the middle of December Marlavai was our headquarters, but several tours led us to the surrounding villages and ultimately to the Tilani area as far as Rompalli and Mangi. We left the district at Christmas and returned again early in March 1943, when we toured the taluqs of Both. Kinwat and Adilabad, reaching Marlavai in the middle of April. While in Hyderabad I had succeeded in obtaining the sanction of H.E.H. the Nizam's Government for a Gond Education

1. A full account of the conditions then prevailing in the Adilabad District is contained in my reports and diaries published under the title *Tribal Hyderabad* by the Revenue Department, Government of H.E.H. the Nizam, Hyderabad 1945.